DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 126 894 IR 003 808

AUTHOR Grossman, Lawrence K.
TITLE Public Television and Public Education.
PUB DATE 16 Jun 76
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Open Learning and Nontraditional Study (3rd, Lincoln, Nebraska, June 16, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Television; Federal Aid; Financial Support; Paradox; Production Techniques; *Public Television; Speeches; State Aid
IDENTIFIERS *Public Broadcasting Service

ABSTRACT

Examination of educational television reveals four paradoxes which are just now being resolved. The first is that, as educational television becomes more public, it becomes less educational. This accusation is mollified by the high educational impact of recent public television broadcasts. Secondly, high initial expectations for educational television have led to disillusionment, but, fortunately, a new generation of more realistic expectations has been formulated. A third paradox is that, just at a time when educational television is demonstrating tremendous potential, it has become vulnerable to state and local budget cuts. Fourth, public television resources are being used to produce well-researched, sophisticated programs at a time when spontaneity and amateurism in television production are considered to be of educational value. (EMH)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED126894

PUBLIC TELEVISION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Remarks by

Lawrence K. Grossman

President,

Public Broadcasting Service

Before the

THIRD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON OPEN LEARNING

AND NONTRADITIONAL STUDY

University of Mid-America

Lincoln, Nebraska

June 16, 1976

IR003808

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

It is a great privilege to be here. I must tell you that ever since I was invited to speak to this conference, I have been quite nervous about it. I have felt that it is presumptuous, on my part, coming as I do from those two betes noires -- advertising and commercial television -- and being certainly new to public television, to be talking to all of you, who have spent so much more time and know so much more about the fields of extended learning, nontraditional learning and education.

I went for advice to my television colleagues to find out what I should talk about. They said, "You should emphasize the tremendous importance of television to the learning process. Stress the educational and instructional content of our programming -- the intellectual aspirations of our programming." Then I talked to my educator colleagues and I asked them what I should talk about. They said, "You should talk about television production, about the importance of injecting some drama, entertainment value and excitement into the educational television mode." And I was reminded of the conversation between George Bernard Shaw and Alexander Korda, the famous movie producer. Korda was trying to get the rights of Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra for a feature film. After about and hour's conversation, Shaw said to Korda, "You know, I'm really

disappointed by this rather paradoxical talk we are having. You have spent the past hour nattering on about nothing except creativity, artistic purity and the concern for integrity in your movies, when all that I came here to talk to you about is money." So I thought I would disregard all the good advice I did receive and talk to you instead, about four paradoxes that I have observed in the joining together of the wonderful new world of television in which we operate and the much older world of education.

The first paradox involves a piece of conventional wisdom and common belief that I do not share in the slightest. Apparently, there are some professionals who believe that the more public public television gets, the less educational it becomes. I am convinced the opposite is true; the more public that public television becomes the more educational impact it has demonstrated.

Public television in this country is deeply rooted in educational television and instructional television. And, as with every new technology, it has been perceived as an extension of what had gone before, namely as an extension of the classroom. If we look at it in historical and sociological terms, the perception of educational television as simply an electronic classroom is really no different from the automobile first being thought of as a horseless carriage; the light bulb being talked of in terms of candle power; movies really being viewed as motion pictures, and the steam engine being measured in terms of horsepower. Television, itself, was produced at first as if it were merely radio with pictures. Television's earliest programs simply pointed cameras at radio shows.

Inevitably, each of these technologies attained a state of maturity which developed a discipline, an art form, a quality and a life of its own that bears very little resemblance to what had gone before. The automobile bears no more resemblance to the horseless carriage than television resembles radio. Not only has there been a radical change from what had gone before, but the new technology often, has produced a change in the entire industry and indeed in the entire society.

I believe that educational, now public television, has reached a stage of comparable maturity. We began with educational and instructional television and we are now in the vastly different new mode, so to speak, of public television. I suggest to you that one of the first milestoneson the way from educational to public television started with Sesame Street, which offered educational television techniques that bore no more resemblance to the classroom than a candle to electricity. Today, the process continues with the Adams Chronicles, the most popular series in the history of public television; with the Incredible Machine, the National Geographic special about the body that achieved the greatest single audience in our history; with the Ascent of Man. and with Upstairs, Downstairs from Masterpiece Theatre. These building blocks of public television have in truth, become blockbusters in their educational impact. Programs like Adams Chronicles and the Ascent of Man, have had unprecedented impact on classroom learning and on the nontraditional modes of at-home learning and extended learning which are the subjects of your conference.

These major public television programs have had very little relationship at all to traditional classroom procedures -- to the educational process as we have always known it, even though they have been extraordinarily successful in educational terms. These programs represent a very small part of our schedule but a very major part of our audience -- a very major part of public television's impact. It has occurred to me that through this new level of quality and new dimension of public television, we have achieved far more intense, far more legitimate educational impact than television ever has had before. And, we are merely on the threshold.

So, the next time people start talking about educational television losing its mission of educational instruction because it is reaching out to the public as public television, I would urge you to think twice about that paradox. Because, in truth, indeed just the opposite is happening.

The second paradox that struck me about the relationship between education and television also requires something of an historical view. When educational television began in this country, it hit with cyclonic impact. Many in the educational establishment viewed the new medium as a panacea. Their expectations were enormous. Money was poured forth in profusion, surveys were conducted, and as you know better than I, it was going to be the answer to all of our problems -- the answer to the baby boom and school overcrowding; the answer to the perennial teacher shortage. (Remember the teacher shortage?) The answer to bringing up the level of disadvantaged kids to the level of middle class society. We had far too many hopes for educational television.

A reaction set in and with it disillusion. Our schools are filled with television equipment that is unused, much of it in bad repair, a lot of it simply abandoned. The expectation had been all out of proportion to what could really be accomplished. One measure of the unrealities of our unexpectations is that the educational budget in this country totals some eighty billion dollars. The public broadcastin budget in this country totals some three hundred million dollars. So three eights of one percent or thereabouts, was expected to turn around the entir educational establishment and accomplish miracles in the educational world.

While there has been a reaction in many quarters to this sort of over-promise and over-expectation, what I detect happening now is a kind of a healthy third stage. Education through television is coming in to, I think, the most innovative, the most fruitful, the most catalytic period that we have enjoyed. We now have a more realistic sense of expectation of what can be accomplished in the use of educational television, instructional television and public television. I know that public television, in terms of extending education in its best sense, and classroom television in terms of the traditional learning modes, are both going through tremendous changes at this point. They are rebounding from their low periods.

Which leads us to the third paradox -- one that hits close to home because it is part of the breakthrough that we are talking about in public television. We are in an era of a tremendous upsurge of public interest in public television. We have a long way t go to be sure. But the quality of programming is certainly improving enormously. And audiences are flocking to public television in unprecedented numbers. I can give you some of the numbers to give you an idea of the dimension of this change that is coming about. This season, for the first time,

a majority of the American homes are watching their local public television station in the course of each month. This, despite the fact that more than two-thirds of our public television stations are "second class citizens" on the television band and are the most difficult to find and tune in. Still, we find that public television's night-time audience has increased an astonishing 34% over just a year ago and more than 50% over two years ago. We find that many of our programs now are beginning to achieve measurable numbers and some even (as terrible as it may sound) competitive numbers to commercial television for the more interesting and generally more beneficial programs on public television.

We also find that the federal government's level of funding has increased enormously. In 1967, the first year of federal appropriations, public broadcasting received $5 million. In 1976, public broadcasting received $78.5 million in federal matching grants. That means we have to raise $2.50 for every $1.00 we are entitled to from the federal government. So you can see that the Congress and the President are responding to this surge of public interest and are coming along in support of public broadcasting accordingly.

We also see a tremendous increase in community support. This March, during FESTIVAL '76, the local public television stations raised over $10 million, including local matching grants, with 325,000 families contributing an average of $24.00 a family to their local channel. Here in Nebraska, family memberships went up 500% over a year ago. Across the country they were double those of a year ago. It is an incredible and unprecedented avalanche of public support that we are witnessing. Part of it, I believe, may be in reaction to what is available on commercial television. Part of it is that people are

just beginning to wake up to the exciting and diversified offerings that are available now on public television.

Yet paradoxically, while all that is happening, we find that our state and local educational support for public broadcasting (which had been the single largest source of public television's and public radio's support) are decreasing precipitously because our school boards and our state educational systems have found themselves in very severe financial trouble. More than two-thirds of our stations are licensed to school boards or state universities or state educational bodies and a number of these stations are now in jeopardy just at the very time when we are reaching new heights of public awareness all around the country.

Yesterday I had a visit from the head of a state network. We were talking about how the tradition of academic freedom has provided a strong shield for our university licensed public broadcasting stations. That shield protects our stations from state and governmental interference in program content. Nevertheless, he had to report to me that his stations were not ready to take the public affairs programming that we were providing this year. He is suffering a severe cutback in state funds at the very time when public television nationwide is going through its most exciting period. Too many of our stations are on the edge; these stations turn out to be those licensed to and funded by school boards, state legislatures, state universities, state boards of education.

Fortunately there are many exceptions to this unwelcome situation. I am glad to say that the Nebraska Educational Television Network is one of our shining exceptions. But we have a vulnerable situation in this time of rising expectations and it is cause for great concern.

It might be interesting to note that in the past few years, one of the healthiest developments that has happened to public television is the fact that most of our stations have gone out into their communities for support. To date, only 16% of our stations still have not turned to their own communities for financial support through underwriting and memberships. And every single one of those stations happens to be an educational institution licensee. And that, too, is a matter of concern.

All this puts me in mind of a story I heard from Herman Kahn last week. Kahn just wrote a book called The Next Two Hundred Years, a very optimistic account of the unprecedented prosperity we are going to enjoy in this country and in the world. Herman Kahn always thinks 180 degrees opposite everybody else. He was the one who wrote about thinking about the unthinkable thermal nuclear war. And he told a story of the Rabbi who was sitting looking over God's shoulder as God was creating the world and creating man. I do not know how he got there, but he was there. And an angel came down and said, "Rabbi, are you optimistic or pessimistic?" The Rabbi said, "Oh, I am optimistic. This is an incredible wonder." The angel said, "Well, why do you look so downcast, so gloomy?" And the Rabbi said, "Well, to tell you the truth, I am not sure that my optimism is justified." I think public television is in that state today. We have tremendous potential and yet we have great vulnerability as well.

And that brings me sort of indirectly to the fourth paradox. To me it may be the most interesting paradox of all because it falls outside of my own experience. It has to do with the contrast between two styles of television.

Public television, PBS, is now bringing people high quality, well-produced, sophisticated programming of the nature of the Ascent of Man and the Adams Chronicles. These are highly polished, carefully researched programs. At the same time, there is a wholly new, contrasting development going on -- the rising use of port-a-pack, inexpensive, mobile, lightweight television equipment; small form video tape and the super-eight format in film.

Some kids are actually being taught not to learn because they are asked to read and write even when they have disabilities that prevent them from learning in traditional ways. When they do write an assignment they get back papers filled with red marks and yellow marks and crosses and complaints about spelling and grammar and capitalization and punctuation. Gradually these kids close up and turn off education altogether. Enter the audio tape, video tape and super-eight revolution. My wife is a special education teacher who has begun to do extraordinary things with this equipment. She takes kids who had to be dragged kicking and screaming into school because they continually failed and puts a video tape port-a-pack or super-eight camera into their hands. These kids, who always found school to be a negative experience, seem suddenly to be turned onto something very exciting. They are communicating and they are doing their work by creating tape and film programs and reports and it is really thrilling to see the transformation in attitude and accomplishment. In witnessing that, it has occurred to me that here we are talking about public television, with its broad gauge, high style, polished programming on one level; and the crude, amateur port-a-pack revolution in teaching on the bottom level. Then there are all of the new areas of video education that you people are involved in in between. It

seems clear to me that working together on this exciting new frontier of learning -- both nontraditional and traditional learning, through educational, instructional and public television -- we are all really at a turning point in time. We are all lucky to be in it together because we are approaching the most fruitful, most exciting and most innovative period of television and education that we have ever experienced. The future possibilities are simply staggering.

Thank you.

# # # # #